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6:15 P.M. Approx.

After the ExComm meeting breaks up, several advisers remain in the Cabinet Room to continue the discussion.

Informal Discussion of Cuba Situation¹

McGeorge Bundy: [*Unclear*] by implication. He's never actually said, "I'll get Castro to agree to anything."

Unidentified: [*Unclear*.]

George Ball: There are some disadvantages in trying to get Castro to agree to anything, the more I think about it, because he's going to insist on trying to get those five points into the [*unclear*].

Adlai Stevenson: He sure will.

Alexis Johnson: [00:38] The more you can keep him out of it, it seems to me, and away and deal with the Soviet Union. As long as we make clear the limitations of any non-invasion . . .

Ball: Well—

Bundy: Clearly, there's another way of turning that around—this is perhaps a way of responding to what Ambassador Stevenson has been impressing on us today. Supposing for a moment we get nothing from Castro, what can we give that the Soviets could construe as an assurance?

Unidentified: That as long as he kept peace we [*unclear*] . . .

¹ Including George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Harlan Cleveland, U. Alexis Johnson, Dean Rusk, Adlai Stevenson, and other unidentified participants. Tape 57, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings.

Dean Rusk: We get nothing from Castro?

Bundy: [*Unclear*] that's the premise. [*chuckling*] Because I think this is the likely result. This is the kind of guy this is.

Rusk: If Castro reserves complete freedom of action, so do we.

Ball: Yes, but you can say that—

Bundy: You can say that same thing in another way.

Ball: You can say it in another way.

Unclear exchange.

Unidentified: As long as he behaves as a . . . does not take any aggressive action .

Bundy: [*Unclear*] needs to say, "As the President said on September the umpti-umth, we are not planning an invasion and the following conditions—we assert—unless one or another of the following outrages occurs, we can give you this assurance." You can certainly do that much.

Theodore Sorensen: [01:46] Without any on-site inspections?

Bundy: Well, you can at least raise the question. You're not giving anything you hadn't given before October 10.

Sorensen: No, but there have been changes.

Bundy: I agree. But . . .

Sorensen: Quite an [*unclear*]. It seems to me that we ought to go back to that *status quo ante-bellum* only . . .

Bundy: You would hold that our assurances of October 27 are . . . require more fulfillment than anything we've said before that, because of this enormous act, this plot against us by these two wicked governments.

Rusk: That's right.

Bundy: Yeah.

Rusk: Say that on its face.

Stevenson: You have to face the possibility that you won't get anything out of Castro—

Bundy: Then your question is, what do you take.

Stevenson: Uhum.

Unidentified: That's exactly it. That's where we started.

Ball: Well, I don't think you want anything out of Castro.

Stevenson: [02:36] Well, I'm not so sure you're not right on that.

Ball: I wouldn't—I don't think Castro is the kind of fellow you have anything to do with. All you do is you make some assurances to the Soviet Union, which are qualified [*unclear*].

Unclear comments.

Stevenson: That's right.

Alexis Johnson: Qualified on [*unclear*].

Stevenson: Conditioned on his behavior, and [*unclear*]—

Ball: Well, on his behavior and on certain other safeguards. That's what you do.

Sorensen: Yeah.

Ball: That's what you do.

Bundy: So you're not getting anything—

Ball: So, you don't talk to Castro and you don't ask him to say a thing. But you put him in the position where it's . . . he violates a condition by acting. And then you reserve your [*unclear*]—

Stevenson: Don't you think it would be proper to ask one thing from him? And that is a promise not to reintroduce [strategic] weapons?

Ball: No, I don't think it's—and frankly, I think you ought to treat it as not being worth anything. If he reintroduces weapons, then obviously there's no engagement, invasion business is off, if he does.

Stevenson: Why, now why do you say that? Unless he's promised not to?

Ball: No, because that's the terms in which you give the non-invasion guarantee.

Unclear comments.

Ball: And that is an element of safeguard, you see. The word “safeguard” is a very good word. You have a safeguard against the reintroduction of weapons. Now, one of the safeguards is that your non-invasion guarantee is given on that condition. But you don’t deal with Castro. Because once you deal with Castro you get all these five points in and you have . . . It’s [unclear] to deal with Castro.

Rusk: He almost got invaded when he introduced them once before.

Ball: Yeah. Obviously, there are certain things under which you could never give a non-invasion guarantee and have it stick. I’m mean, not have it [unclear]. If he dropped bombs on Miami—

Bundy: What you really want to do is give this assurance in such terms that Castro really has to change.

Ball: Exactly!

Harlan Cleveland: That’s right. That’s right.

Unidentified: But in such a way that’s useful—

Bundy: But in such a way that Khrushchev can get something out of it.

Cleveland: That’s right. Get something [unclear].

Unclear exchanges.]

Bundy: That’s not impossible. That’s not impossible, no.

Cleveland: [Unclear].

Unidentified: This is not [unclear]—

Stevenson: That Khrushchev can go back and say, “Well [unclear]—“

Bundy: Actually, the ideal result for us is that he should gradually throw Castro away as an Albanian.

Unidentified: That’s what he wants.

Cleveland: Yes.

Ball: Yeah.

Cleveland: Something for Khrushchev and nothing for Castro.

Bundy: Yeah.

Unidentified: That's what we need [*unclear*]. This is nuts.

Rusk: Well, we've got some pretty sharp further work.

Stevenson: Yes, there's some sharp work to be done.

Bundy: But I think that's a definable target.

Unidentified: I think that's a—

Bundy: Does that come some distance to what you have in mind, Governor Stevenson?

Stevenson: Yeah.

Bundy: Or do you have it more concrete and more [*unclear*].

Stevenson: I think we ought to write these papers out. I think it's fine to get the papers and, you know, have—talk through these things. This is what's worried me about it. This talk of . . .

Unclear background conversation.

Unidentified: I think we can get it.

Stevenson: Walk around it without getting down to really point by point decisions. This is where you get to the point. I do think on the next letter to Castro—I mean to Khrushchev—if we introduce too much stuff it will be too complicated. Or if it looks as though we're trying to enlarge the deal, it would be a mistake. I think we ought to stick pretty close to the terms of the original agreement, within his capacity to perform.

Bundy: We'll have available, for tomorrow morning's discussion,² a summary of the last message³ and . . . I will say that he did not seem to bridle at the rather rambling tone of our last one.

Unclear exchange. Someone mentions something about rambling, presumably referring to Khrushchev's often long letters.

Rusk: He's got a capacity to perform [*unclear*].

² The next morning at 11 A.M. the ExComm met without the President in George Ball's State Department office. For John McCone's memorandum of that meeting, see *FRUS*, pp.443-44.

³ *FRUS* 11:437-441.

Bundy: Not every rambler likes a rival.

Rusk: He's got a capacity to perform in Cuba if he would exercise it.

Stevenson: Oh yes, he can . . .

Cleveland: So, [unclear]—

Rusk: But I don't think we let him off the hook of the October 27 letter [unclear].

Bundy: I think he has a capacity to perform, but I don't really think it's clear he has a capacity to make Castro perform. I think that in that sense it may be, really, very impractical formulaic problem. I think he can probably get his bombers out.

Cleveland: He can play the bombers as his or as Castro's.

Bundy: Yes.

Cleveland: [Unclear.]

Bundy: I would guess from this message they really are his.

Cleveland: He can't take something that really is Castro's and manipulate that.

Stevenson: Well, does he talk about the bombers as to which, as who's . . . ?

Bundy: He says they're his.

Unidentified: They're his.

Unidentified: [06:35] That's very interesting [unclear] encouraging.

Stevenson: I think this, your idea of putting down on paper—

Bundy: No, he didn't quite say that.

Unidentified: Oh, I agree.

As the meeting breaks up several simultaneous conversations take place. Rusk, Alexis Johnson, and others discuss how to transmit messages to the OAS governments. After a few minutes of fragmentary conversation, most participants leave the room and the recorder picks up general office noise.